

HOME FOR LEARNING

Student project almost home

Doors, windows up next for house being built by students from Okanagan College

By JOE FRIES
Penticton Herald

It's not quite a home yet — it doesn't even have windows or doors — but while Okanagan College residential construction students continue building a house in Summerland, they're also building foundations for their careers.

Dubbed the Home For Learning, the project has seen 11 students of all ages and walks of life work on the house. The crew of greenhorn carpentry students convened in February for nine weeks of classroom training before taking the show on the road for some hands-on learning.

On Wednesday, the college hosted a block party to celebrate progress on the house, which so far has benefited from about \$150,000 worth of donated materials and labour.

Students had just finished putting the shingles on the roof, and the next step will see windows and doors installed to get the house to the lock-up stage before interior work commences.

Instructor Siebe Kamstra, a journeyman carpenter in his first year of teaching, said the project has been a learning experience for both him and the students, but it's also been very productive.

"We don't take too much stuff apart now, (like) we did in the beginning," he said with a laugh.

Kamstra's students have worked under the direction of Carsten Nielsen, who's acting as the general contractor on the project. Nielsen, the retired owner of also-retired Carsten Construction, was approached to oversee the project in his old stomp-



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Okanagan College residential construction student Victoria Baschzok puts the finishing touches on the roof of the Home For Learning project in Summerland. Each year, entry-level carpentry students gain valuable experience by helping build a house from the ground up.

ing grounds and said he's glad he accepted the challenge.

"Everyone's wanted to work, everyone's wanted to learn," said Nielsen, who sold the building lot on Karlstrom Place to the college for a "reasonable price."

One of those eager learners is 34-year-old Victoria Baschzok, a former high school teacher who decided to upend her life to see what she's made of.

"I needed to see myself out of the classroom, for my own self-esteem and for my own personal development. I needed to challenge myself," Baschzok said.

The former self-confessed "wannabe do-it-yourselfer" said she chose to go to school first before looking for work, because "I didn't have the confidence to go onto a jobsite and apply for a job."

Now, Baschzok feels as though she can hold her own on the jobsite. She's one of two women who make up the college crew — which includes some of her former students — and she added that her gender really hasn't been a factor in the build.

"These guys are like my brothers, so we tease each other . . . but there's a good camaraderie — I know they've got my back," said Baschzok.

Nielsen said by the end of September he expects the house to be ready for sale and the students, who will be finished the course in July, will be ready to work in the real world.

Before the learners go, however, they'll assist other tradesman, such as plumbers and furnace installers, with their work.

The house, which will feature cultured stone, cedar shakes and fibre-cement exterior siding, will also come with energy-efficient appliances. Kamstra figures the house will sell for a little better than \$500,000.

Any profits will be used to help fund students' future education.